

# End Citizens United

Findings and Recommendations from Polls and  
Focus Groups in Wisconsin, Montana and  
Nevada

May 2017

# Methodology

- Surveys of likely 2018 voters in Wisconsin (N=812) and Montana (N=811) were conducted April 21-26, 2017.
- 47% of all interviews in Montana and 45% of all interviews in Wisconsin were conducted via cell phone.
- The margin of error for both samples is +/- 3.4 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error for subgroups varies and is higher.
- This research is also informed by six focus groups conducted in Milwaukee, Billings, and Las Vegas among white swing voters on March 20-22, 2017.
- **Persuadable Voters** are defined as those who are either undecided or lean to either candidate on the U.S. Senate current vote.

# Key Takeaways

- **Money in politics is as important an issue to voters as “creating jobs and increasing incomes.”**
  - **It is a priority for both independents and Democrats, making it both a persuasion and mobilization issue.**
- **Messages on money in politics increase support for Democratic candidates as much as messages on other core Democratic issues, and are more effective among independent voters.**
- **Voters blame politicians more than special interests for the influence of money in politics.**
- **Language to use to make messaging more impactful:**
  - **Politicians are bought and paid for by special interests (or in the pocket of special interests)**
  - **Special interests spending unlimited amounts of secret money to influence government and elections**
  - **Foreign companies or governments can influence our elections without us knowing**

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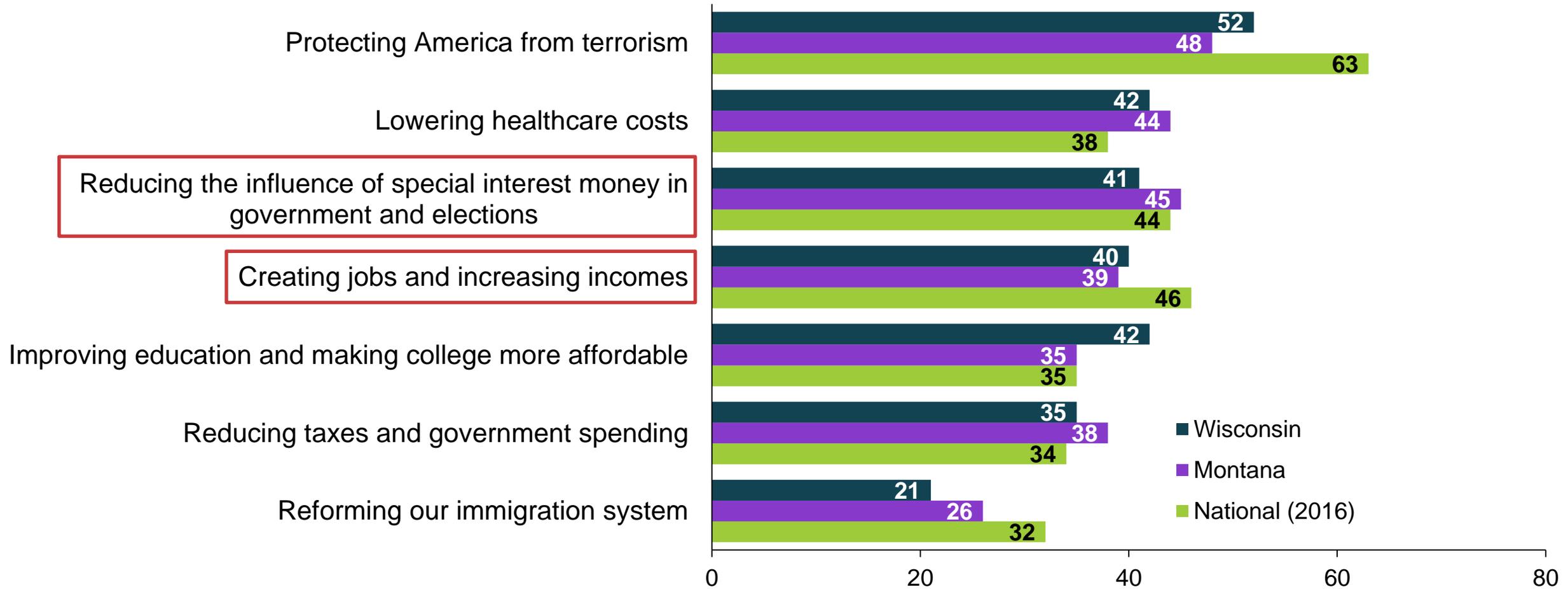
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# IMPORTANCE OF MONEY IN POLITICS AS AN ISSUE

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Reducing the influence of special interest money in politics is seen as big a priority to independents (and voters overall) in these states as “creating jobs and increasing incomes.” This was also the case among independents in our national polling last year.

**Top Priority Among INDEPENDENTS:  
%10 on 1-10 scale**



In the focus groups, participants ultimately blamed money in politics for EVERYTHING wrong in Washington.

“That is why we think all politicians are the same.” (NV)

“Pharmaceutical companies raising the cost of medicine.” (MT)

“Money can buy a politician.” (WI)



“Rich working for the rich.” (WI)

“Who is the puppet master? Who are we really voting for.” (MT)

“It is a big problem. Who listens to the common voice?” (NV)

“We get screwed. Look at Flint, Michigan. The big corporations, they have good water.” (NV)

Democrats, and especially older Democrats, are most likely to prioritize this issue but it is also a priority for white non-college voters.

**WI: Reducing the influence of special interest money in government and elections**  
*%10 on a 1-10 Scale*

Overall	46
Democratic men	62
Democrats 55+	56
Non-college men	54
La Crosse / Eau Claire MM	54

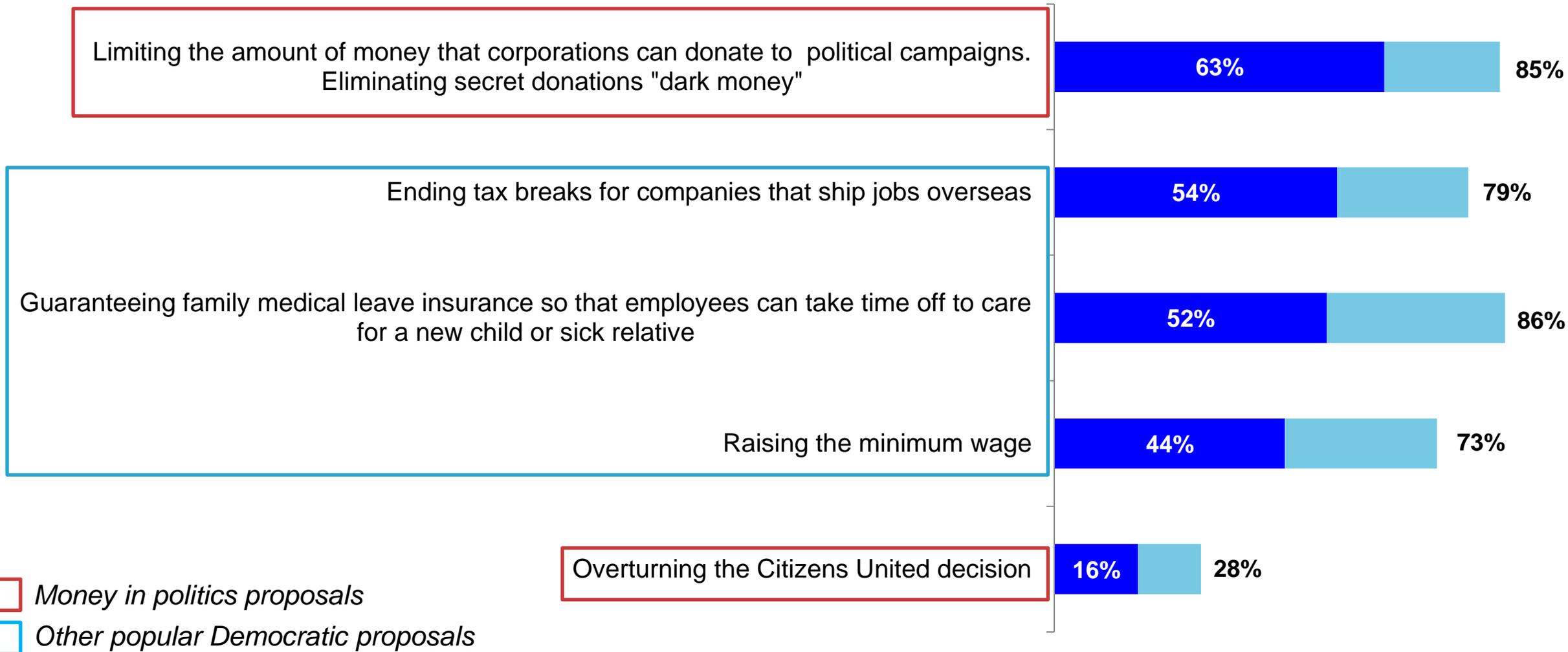
**MT: Reducing the influence of special interest money in government and elections**  
*%10 on a 1-10 Scale*

Overall	43
Democrats 55+	62
Liberal women	58
Democratic women	55
Non-college Independents	50
Seniors	50

National 2016 polling found intense support for a proposal to reduce the influence of money in politics and that it generated even stronger support than other popular Democratic proposals. But just 28% support “overturning Citizens United,” as few are familiar with the name itself.

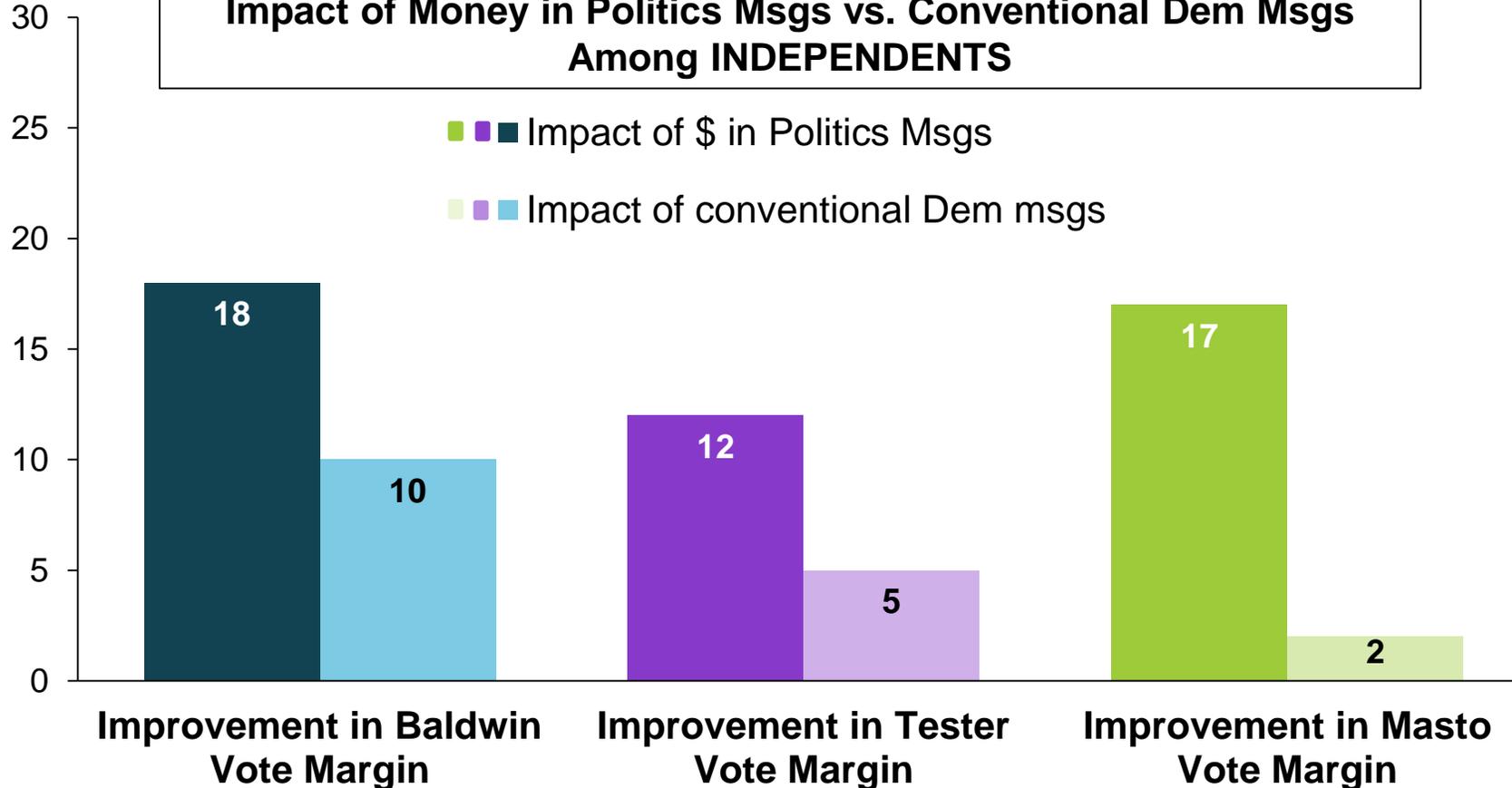
■ Support - Strongly

■ Support - Somewhat



In both WI and MT (and NV last year), messages on reducing the influence of money in politics were much more effective at increasing support for the Democratic candidate among independent voters than conventional Democratic messages. Money in politics msgs were especially effective with non-college independents and white rural voters.

**Impact of Money in Politics Msgs vs. Conventional Dem Msgs Among INDEPENDENTS**



**Groups Most Impacted by Money in Politics Messages**

**WISCONSIN**

- Rural voters +30
- Smwt Conservative +24
- Non-college Indep +21

**MONTANA**

- Moderate Men +21
- Non-college Indep +18
- Rural voters +17

**NEVADA (2016)**

- Latinos +24
- Non-white men +22
- Independents +17

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# MESSAGING ON MONEY IN POLITICS

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In a battery of concerning phrases, “politicians being bought and paid for by special interests” was most concerning in both states and was clearly the most concerning in Wisconsin.

**Current Election System Problems**  
*%Concerns you a great deal*

**Persuadable**  
**Avg WI & MT**

Politicians being bought and paid for by special interests



78%

Special interests making secret political donations



74%

Politicians making backroom deals to help special interests



74%

Special interests being able to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence government and elections



73%

Politicians being in the pocket of special interests



71%

Politicians engaging in pay to play politics to help special interests



73%

Big money in politics



68%

Special interests making secret political donations, known as dark money



66%

Special interest money in politics



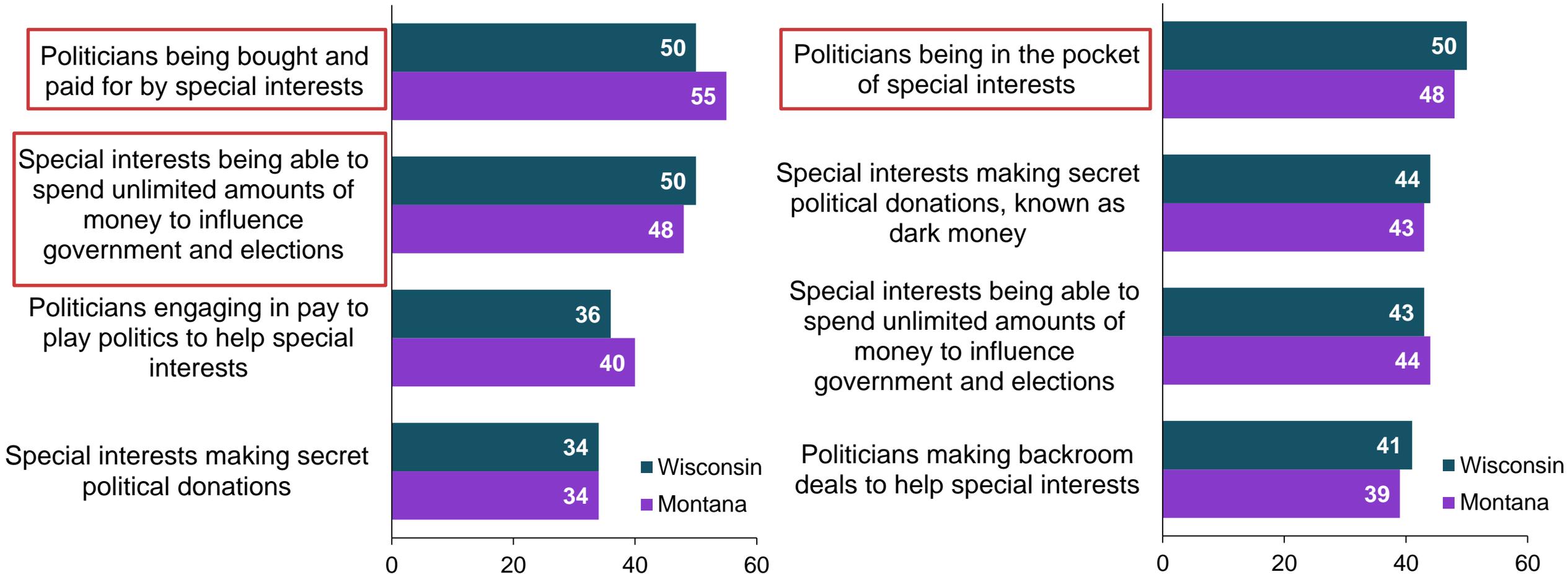
57%

■ WI  
 ■ MT

0 20 40 60 80 100

“Politicians being bought and paid for” also emerged as the most concerning phrase when we forced respondents to choose among them. “Politicians being in the pocket of special interests” and “special interests being able to spend unlimited amounts of money” were also especially concerning.

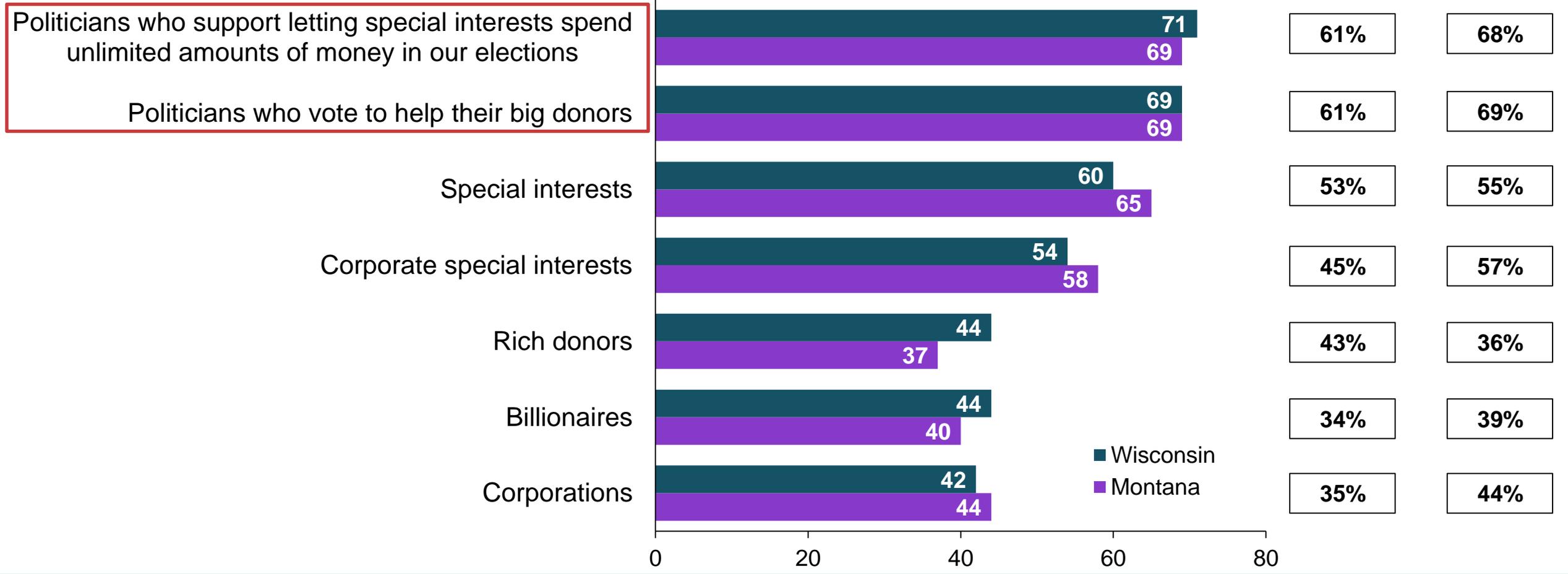
*Which of the following concerns you most about our political system? [1<sup>st</sup> + 2<sup>nd</sup> Choices]*



Politicians are blamed more than donors for the influence of money in politics. There was no difference in either state between politicians “who help big donors” and those who “support letting special interests spend unlimited money in elections.”

Unlike national polling, “special interests” are seen as more to blame than “corporate special interests.”

**Blame for Amount of Money in Politics**  
*%A lot of blame*



Focus group respondents also blamed politicians more than special interests for the role of money in politics.

*“Corporations are trying to influence, but it is all in the hands of politicians.” (NV)*

*“They are for sale.” (MT)*

*“Corporations are going to do what they have to do. We expect them (candidates) to have a little more integrity” (MT)*

*“It is up to the candidate to say yes or no.” (NV)*

*“The politicians are the real one percent.” (MT)*

*“The politicians are to blame. They created it (the system). They use it.” (WI)*



# Main Takeaways on Most Concerning Phrases Related to Money in Politics:

- The same three phrases emerged as most concerning in both states:
  - Bought and paid for by special interests
  - Being in the pocket of special interests
  - Special interests being able to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence govt and elections
- Voters blame politicians more than the special interests for the influence of money in politics. The special interests are going to try to exert influence, but the problem is the politicians who let them.
- The data has been mixed on whether to use “big money in politics” or “special interest money in politics,” so we will explore it more.
- Data has also been mixed on the impact of the term “dark money,” versus just explaining that some money is secret/not disclosed.
  - Some focus group participants understood “dark money,” while others did not, but all understood the system was corrupt.

The foreign money message frame was the best testing of the money in politics messages. It was especially dominant in Montana, both overall and with key swing groups. In WI, a message on money drowning out people's voices was tied as most effective among Baldwin Gainers.

BALDWIN / TESTER POSITIVES <i>%Very convincing</i>	WI	Baldwin Gain	Pers - WI	MT	Tester Gain	Pers - MT
[FOREIGN] <b>A new loophole allows unlimited money to be spent in our elections in secret,</b> which means voters have no idea who is behind it. And because these donations can be made in secret, <b>it is actually possible for foreign companies and governments to influence American elections without the public even knowing.</b> Baldwin / Tester has voted to make all political donations public so that foreign interests can't secretly influence American elections.	45	50	47	49	53	47
[FLOODGATES] Special interests have more influence in elections now than any time in history and are further drowning out the voices of real people. That's why Baldwin / Tester introduced a plan to limit how much special interests can spend in our elections to level the playing field and give people a true voice in their democracy.	40	49	41	38	37	31
[ISSUE IMPACT - ECON] Corporations spend huge amounts of money in our elections to elect politicians who give them sweetheart deals, let them send jobs overseas, and pass policies that hurt workers....	38	39	31	39	38	35
[ISSUE IMPACT - RX] Pharmaceutical companies spend unlimited amounts of money in our elections to elect politicians who let them keep drug prescription drugs prices high. Baldwin/Tester introduced a plan to give real people, not corporations, more of a say in our elections...	38	43	43	38	38	25
[TRUST] More special interest money in our politics has made people lose trust in Washington. Politicians are too concerned about looking out for their donors to look out for the people....	38	42	33	39	44	31
[CORRUPT] Special interests and lobbyists have corrupted politics and caused too many politicians to vote their way. That's why Baldwin/ / Tester proposed a plan to clean up the corruption in Washington by reforming lobbying laws....	36	39	33	37	41	34

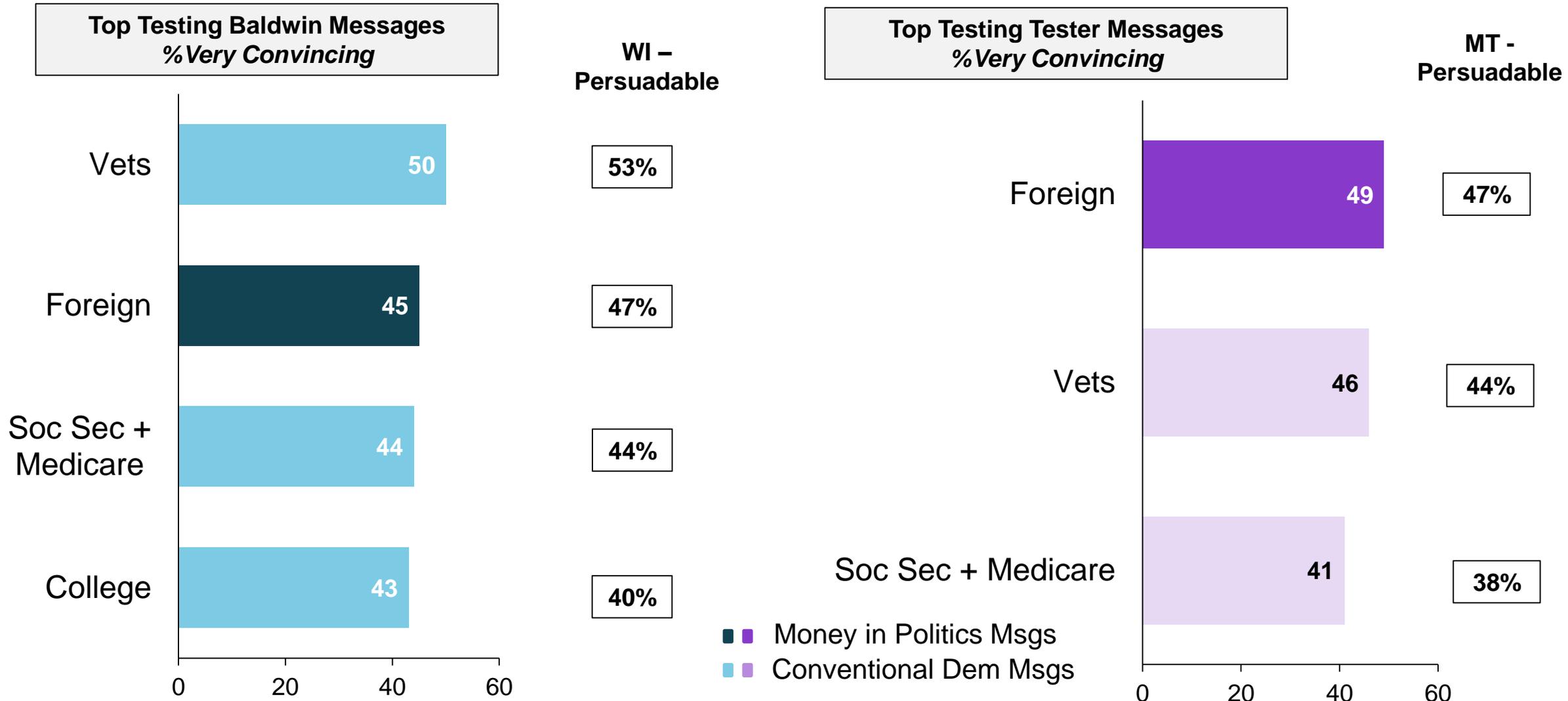
Messages focused on helping corporations at the expense of working Americans and the threat from foreign interests also raised the most concern of the 13 tested in national polling last year.

These two messages tested equally well among independents.

MOST EFFECTIVE ANTI-CITIZENS UNITED MESSAGES: 2016 NATIONAL ONLINE POLL <i>% Top 3 Choice</i>	Ind	Dem	Rep
[HELPS CORPORATIONS] The Citizens United decision has benefited corporations at the expense of working Americans by making it easier for corporations to use their money and influence to get special tax breaks, protect tax loopholes, and send jobs overseas.	38%	39%	35%
[FOREIGN INTERESTS] Because the Citizens United decision allows for money to be spent on elections without revealing the source, it is possible that foreign companies and governments could try to influence American elections.	35%	22%	45%

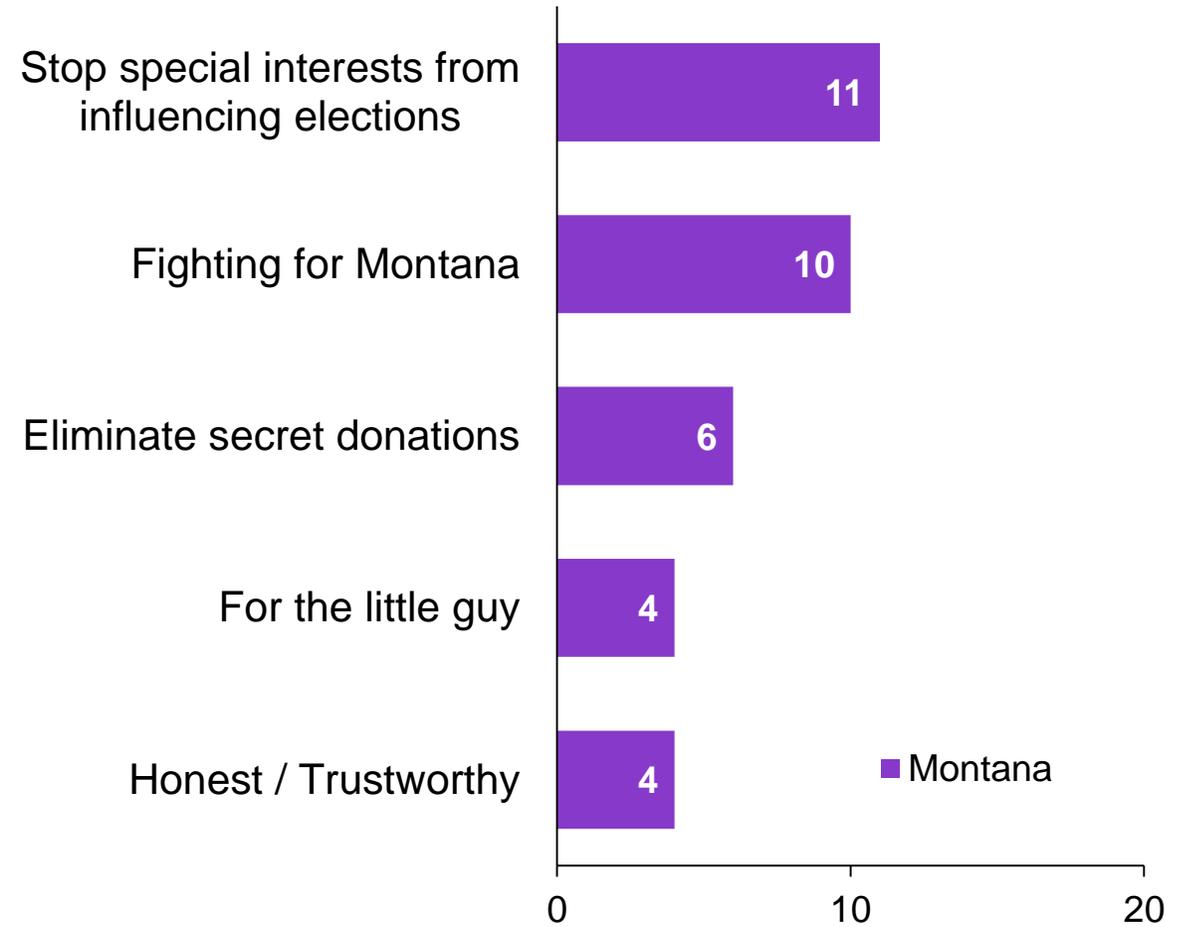
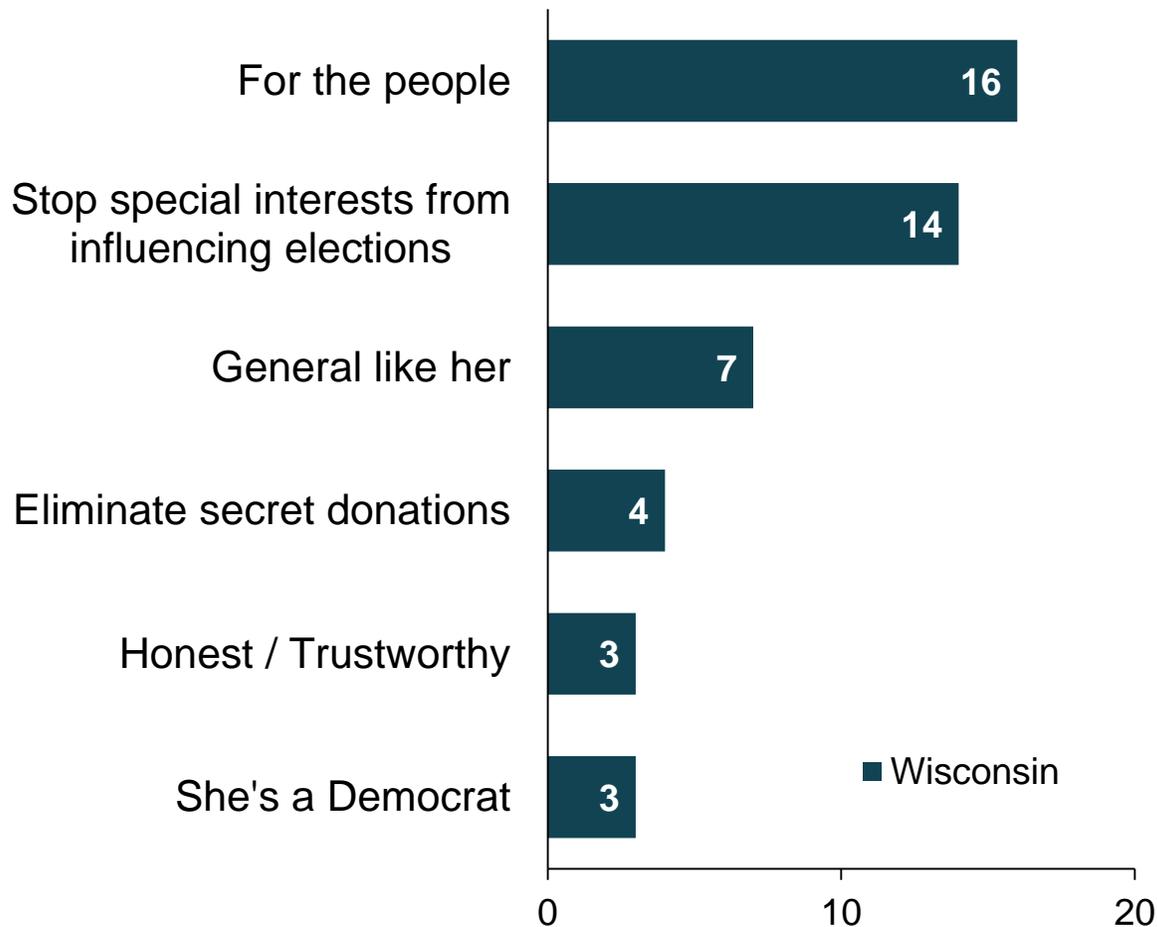
In Montana, the foreign money message also tested higher than any of the more generic Democratic messages, both overall and with persuadable voters. In Wisconsin, it was second only to the message on supporting veterans.

The “money in politics” messages also moved the vote as much as the conventional messages.



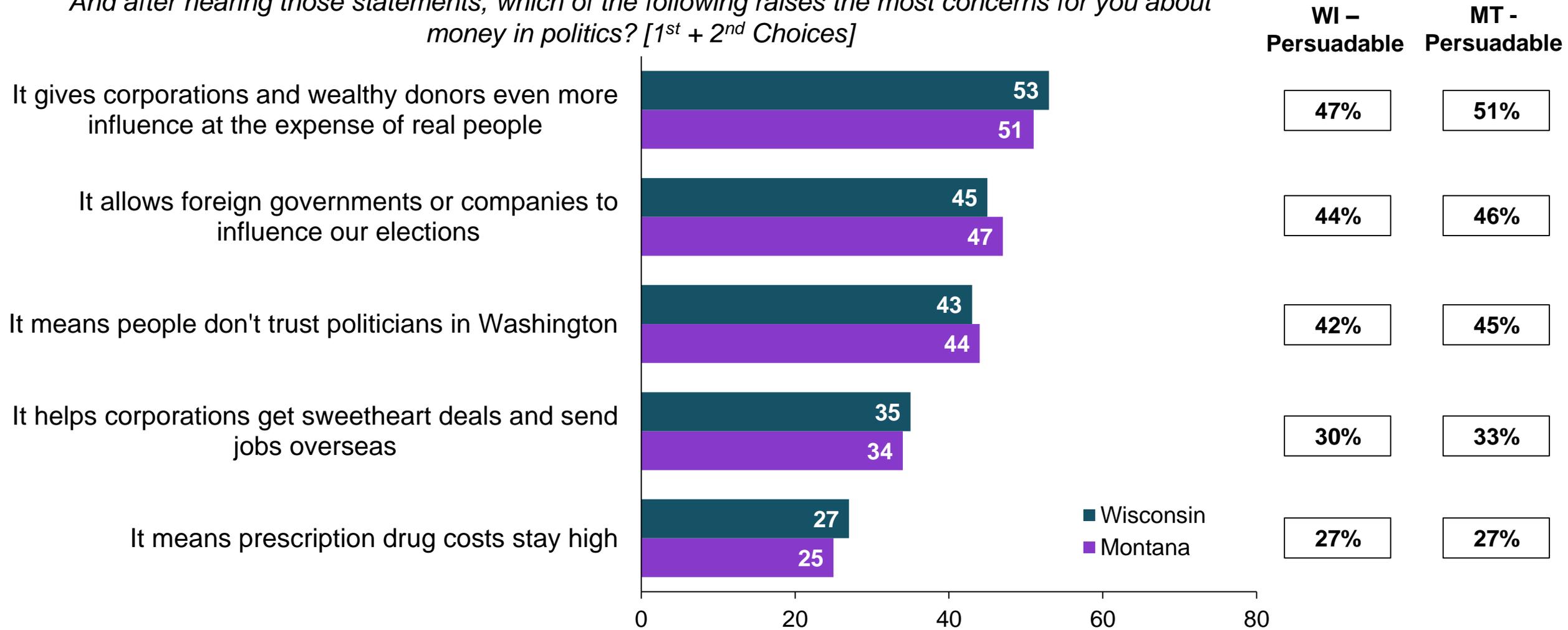
Following the messaging, “stopping special interests from influencing elections” emerged as a top reason to support both Baldwin and Tester in open-end responses.

*After hearing those statements, what do you think is the best reason to support Tammy Baldwin / Jon Tester?*



When respondents are forced to choose their biggest concerns about the consequences of money in politics, the foreign money option was a close second to “giving corporations and the wealthy more influence at the expense of real people.” This suggests that the “foreign money” piece may be strongest when paired with other concerning aspects as it was in the longer message.

*And after hearing those statements, which of the following raises the most concerns for you about money in politics? [1<sup>st</sup> + 2<sup>nd</sup> Choices]*



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# POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT - WISCONSIN

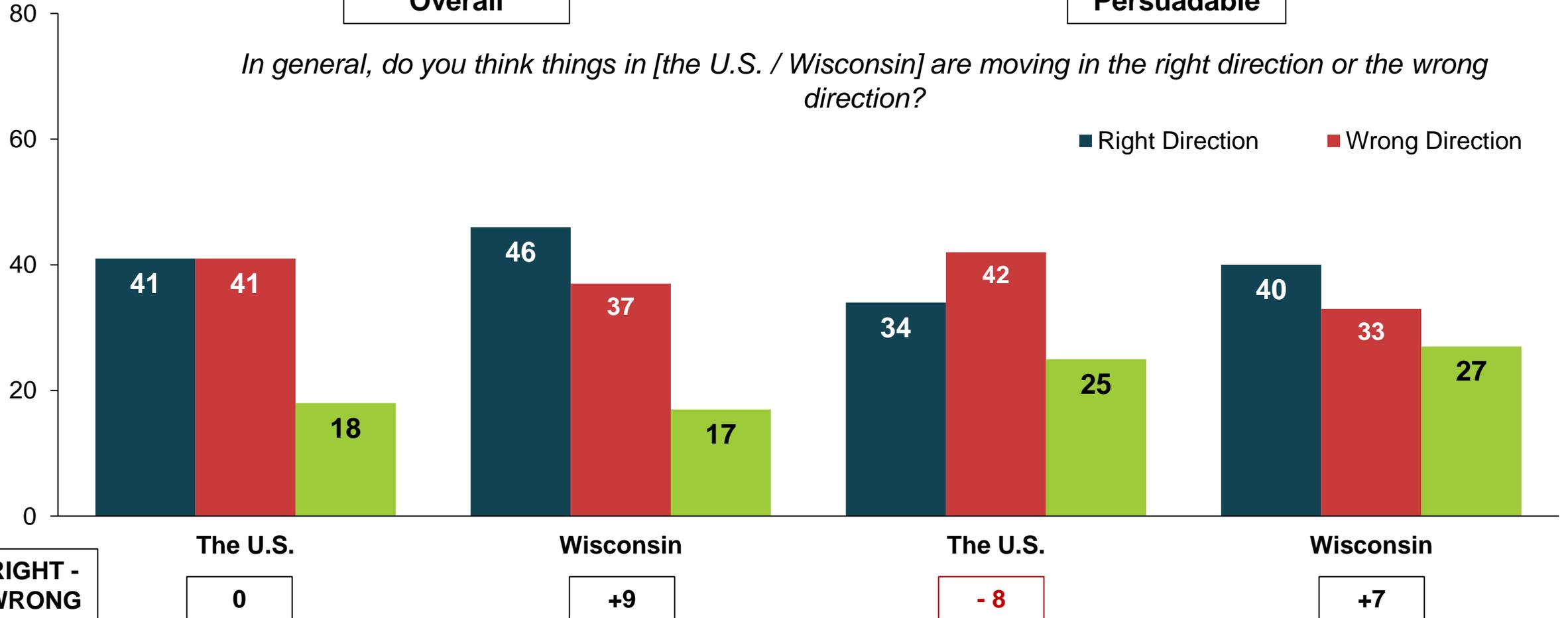
Wisconsin voters are split on the direction of the country, but a plurality believe the state is headed in the right direction. There is a strong partisan divide on both measures, with Republicans much more optimistic and Democrats more pessimistic. Persuadable voters are more pessimistic about the direction of the U.S. than voters overall.

**Overall**

**Persuadable**

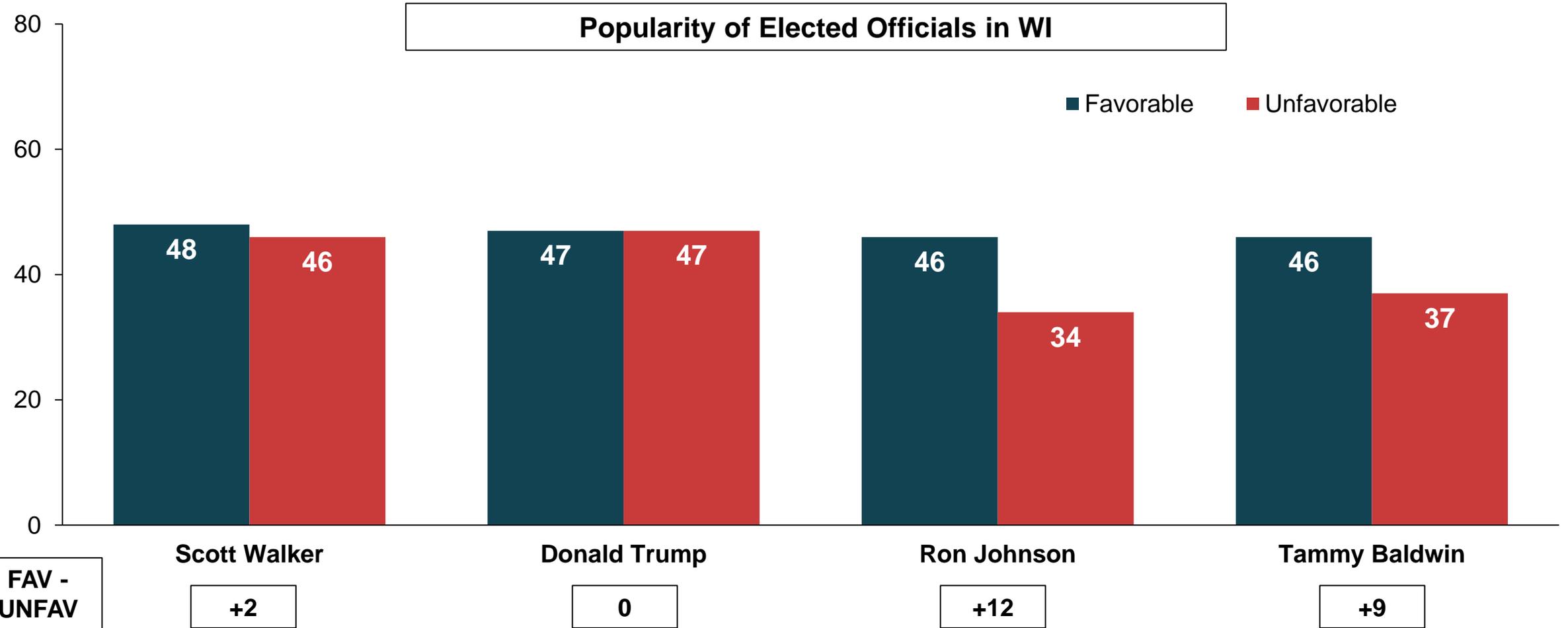
*In general, do you think things in [the U.S. / Wisconsin] are moving in the right direction or the wrong direction?*

■ Right Direction ■ Wrong Direction



**RIGHT -  
WRONG**

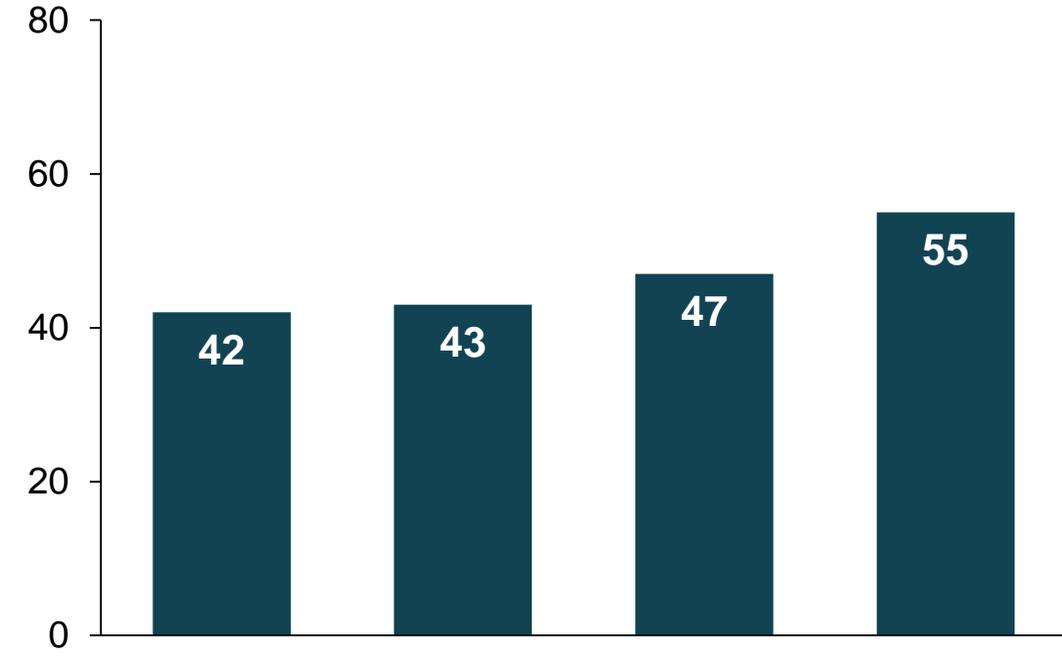
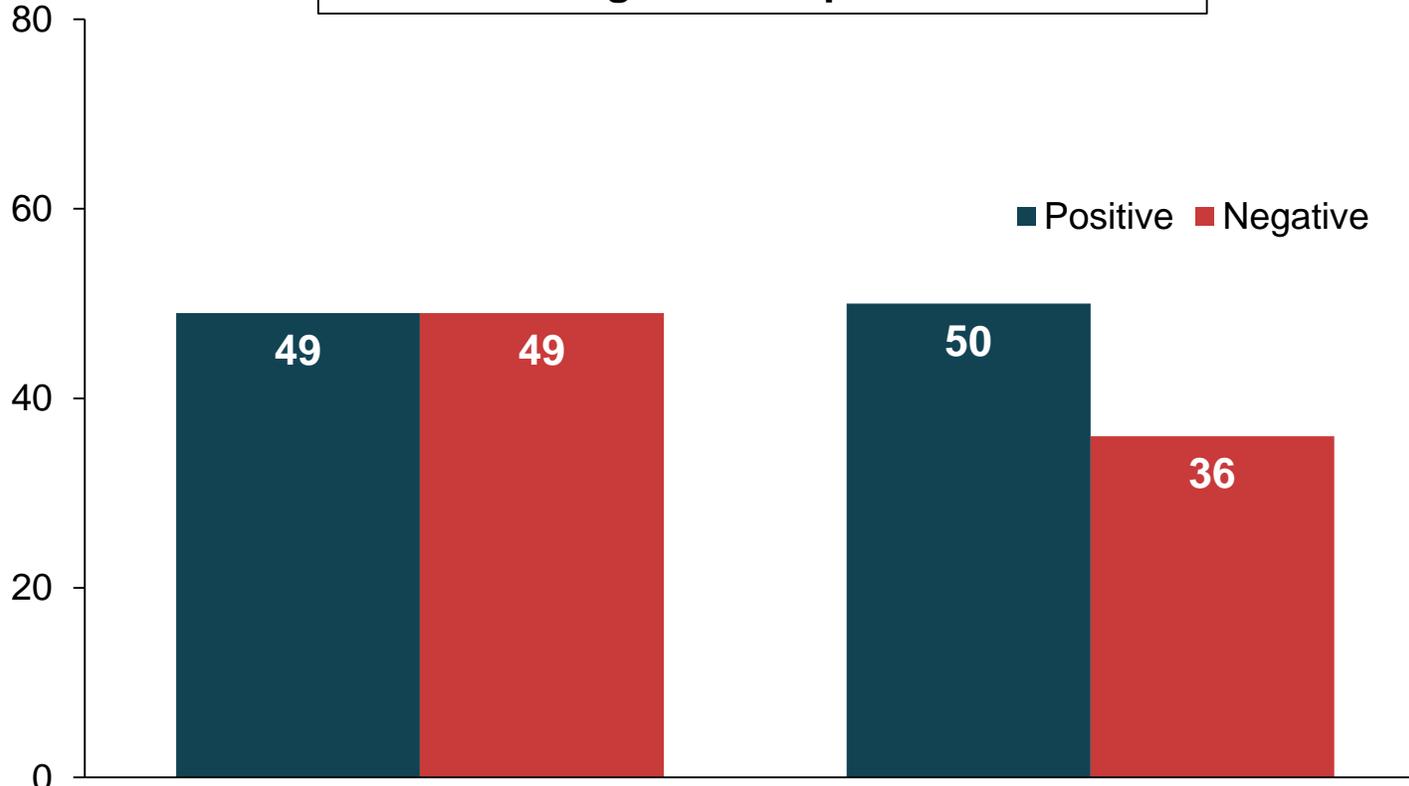
These voters are also split in their views of Walker and Trump. Johnson and Baldwin enjoy comparable net favorable ratings.



Nearly 50% rate Trump's performance positively. Half also approve of Baldwin's performance, and she enjoys a double-digit net positive job rating. Trump's ratings are buttressed by seniors who make up nearly a third of the likely 2018 electorate.

Job Ratings of Trump and Baldwin

Positive Job Rating of Trump by Age



POS -  
NEG

Donald Trump

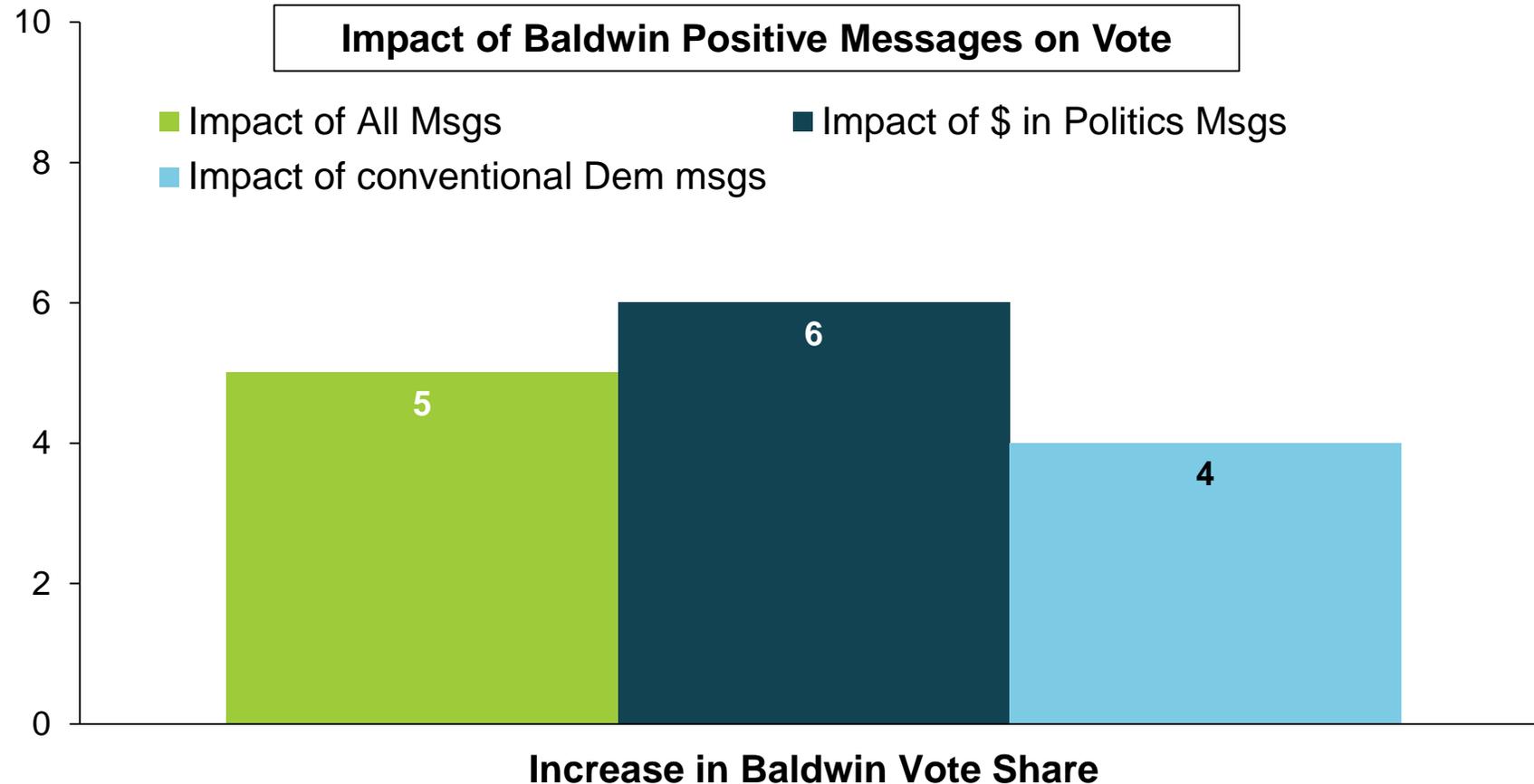
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Tammy Baldwin

+14

Following one-sided messaging in her favor, Baldwin's vote share increases by 5 points, with slightly bigger gains from the "money in politics" messages compared to the conventional ones.

The money in politics messages were especially effective with persuadable voters (+19 vs. +10).



**BIGGEST BALDWIN GAINS TOTAL**

Independent Men	+10
Liberal Men	+10
La Crosse MM	+10

**BIGGEST BALDWIN GAINS \$ IN POLITICS MSGS**

Persuadable Voters	+19
Ind <55	+11
Rural voters	+11

**\$ in politics msgs – Conv. Dem msgs**

**+2**

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# POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT - MONTANA

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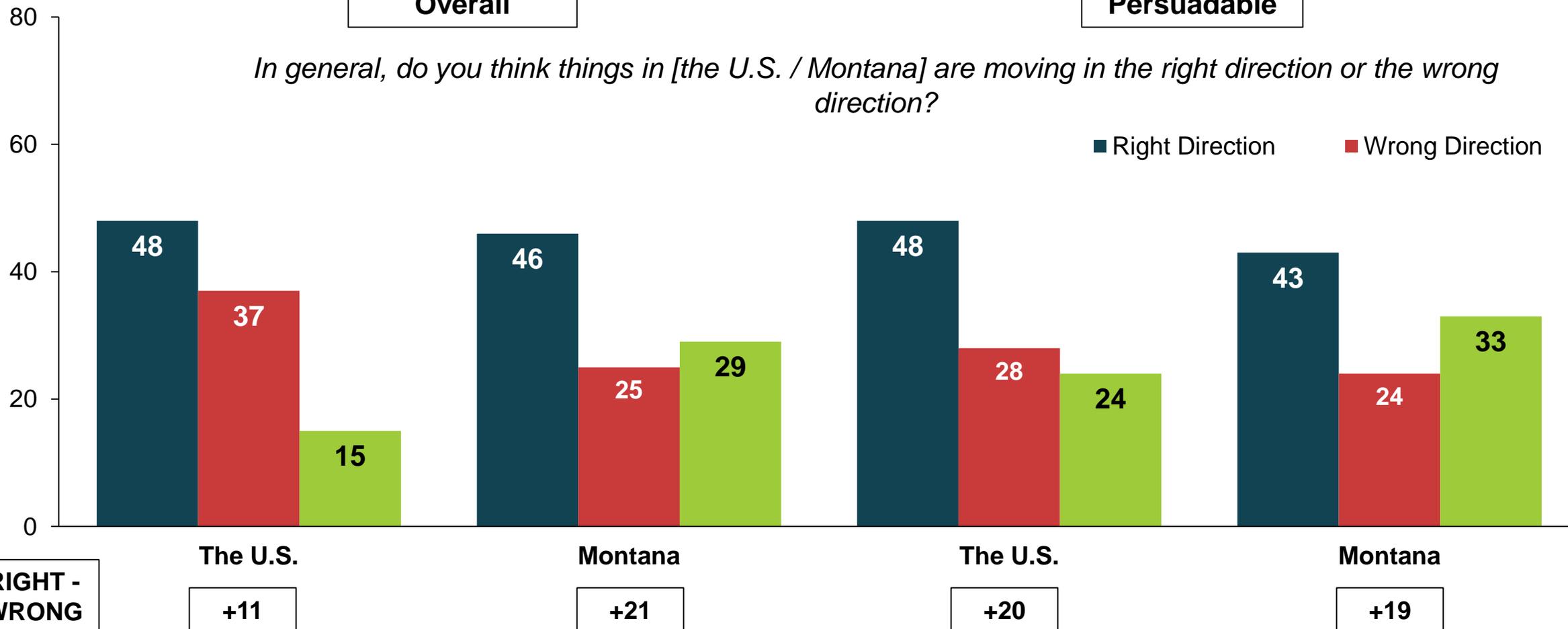
By double-digit margins, voters in Montana believe that both the country and their state are headed in the right direction. This trend holds among persuadable voters. Republicans are very optimistic about the country's direction, while Democrats are equally pessimistic.

**Overall**

**Persuadable**

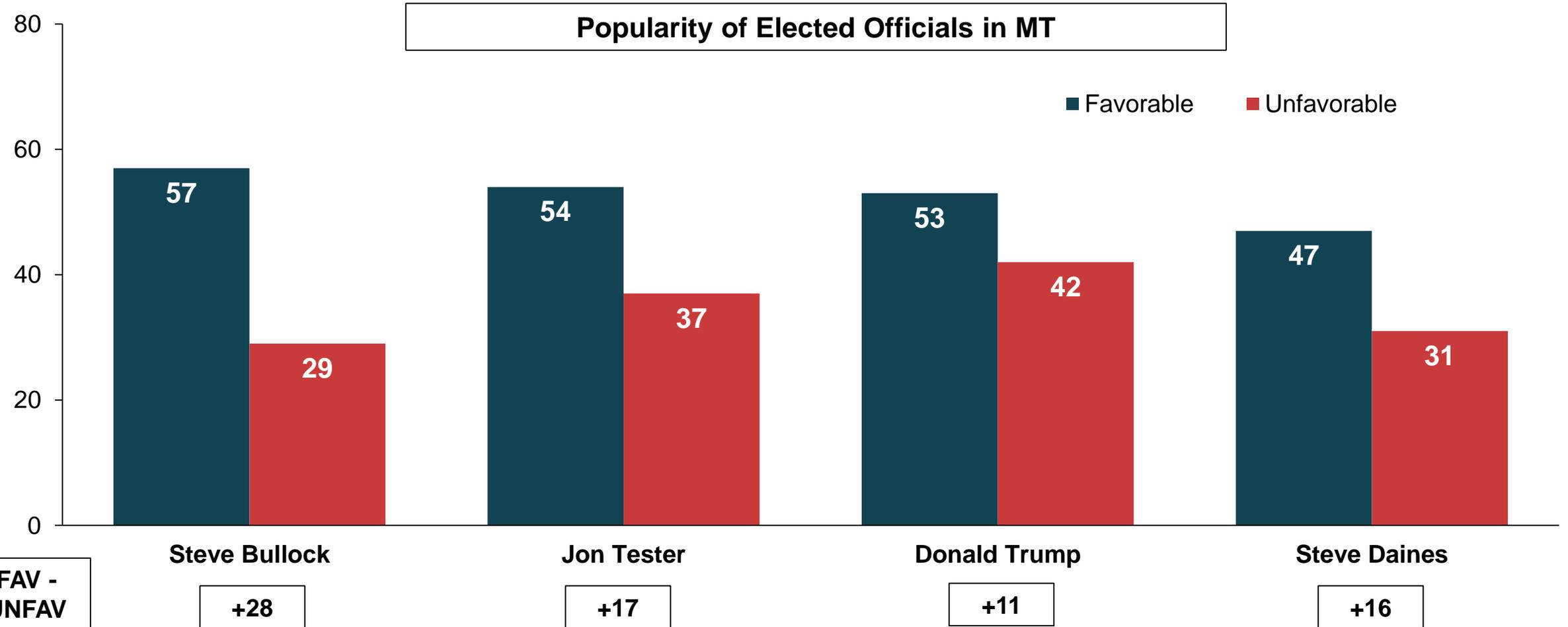
*In general, do you think things in [the U.S. / Montana] are moving in the right direction or the wrong direction?*

■ Right Direction ■ Wrong Direction

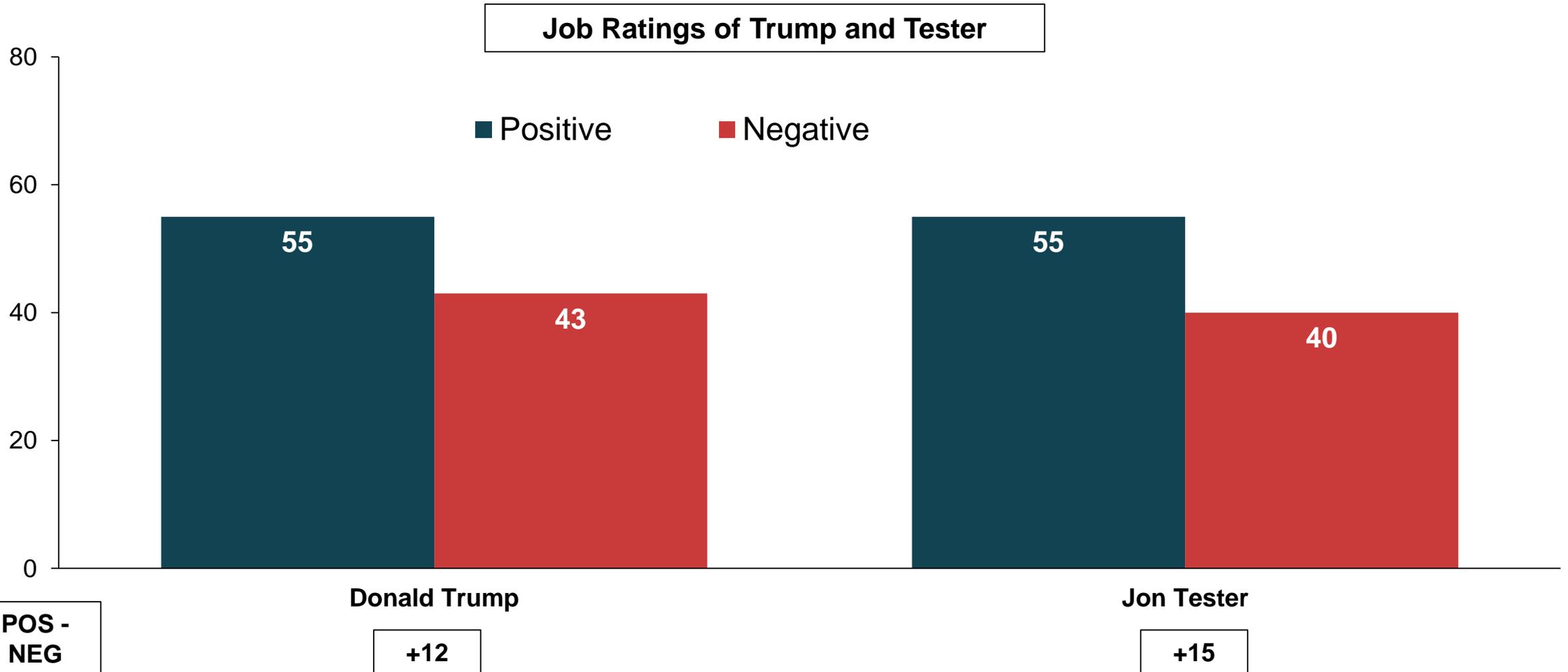


**RIGHT -  
WRONG**

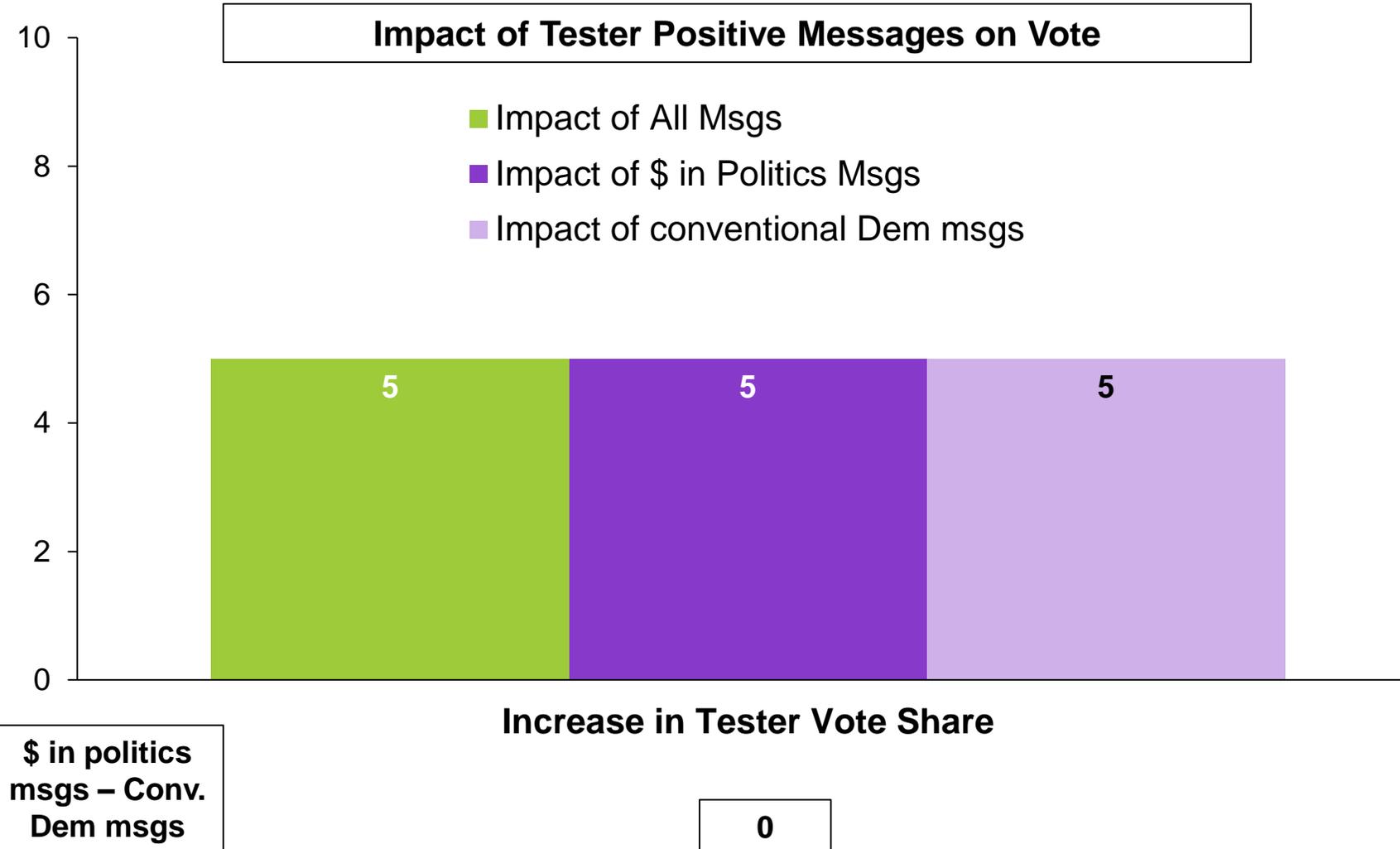
Both Tester and Trump enjoy double-digit net positive ratings. Steve Bullock is especially well-liked, with a positive fav/unfav ratio of 2:1.



Trump and Tester both earn positive job ratings from 55% of voters.



Like Baldwin, Tester's vote share increases by 5 points following messaging. The "money in politics" messages have as big an impact as the conventional ones, and as in Wisconsin, are especially effective moving persuadable voters (+16 vs. +9 for conventional Dem messages).



**BIGGEST TESTER GAINS TOTAL**

Mod Rep	+12
Indep who ID as Liberal	+10
<55 Republican	+9
Helena MM	+8

**BIGGEST TESTER GAINS \$ IN POLITICS MSGS**

Persuadable Voters	+16
Moderate men	+11

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**CONCLUSION**

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# Context for talking about money in politics:

- Need to make plain the system is fundamentally different after Citizens United; what we are seeing now is unprecedented in the modern era, not business as usual.
- There is not a huge need to educate voters about this issue; voters do not know all the details, but they know the system is corrupt.
- In the campaign context, do not make this a partisan issue. Voters of all parties are with us on this issue and it is especially effective at moving independents.
- When possible, connect this issue to voters' everyday lives, particularly when used as a comparative. Health care and prescription drugs are the hottest issues right now, especially given the large share of older voters in the midterm electorate.

# Specific language to use on money in politics:

## ▪ Define the problem:

Politicians who are bought and paid for / in the pocket of special interests

Special interests can **now** give unlimited amounts of secret money to influence government and elections

## ▪ Describe the impact:

This gives corporations and special interests more influence in politics at the expense of regular people, meaning higher drug prices...

Secret donations mean foreign companies and governments can influence American elections without the public knowing

## ▪ Provide a solution:

Limit amount of money special interests can donate to candidates

Make special interest donations public so that foreign interests can't secretly influence American elections